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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 001157

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: Nicaraguan Independent Media Attacked Again; Albanisa to Buy Major Nicaraguan News Channel?

REF: A) MANAGUA 1111; B) MANAGUA 959; C) MANAGUA 916; D) MANAGUA 626

CLASSIFIED BY: RJCallahan, AMB; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1. (C) Summary: Independent media is under attack again in Nicaragua. Two civil court judges recently filed a "preventive embargo" against Radio

Radio 15 de Septiembre faces "embargo"

2. (U) Late evening, December 10, a judge issued a "preventive embargo" for USD \$10,000 dollars against Radio 15 de Septiembre, a radio station

3. (U) QuinC3nez, AvellC!n, and Deputy Eduardo Montealegre claim the preventive embargo and protest is another politically motivated attempt to

If you can't beat them, join them-Telenica to Albanisa?

4. (U) On December 14, NC)stor Castillo, judge for the Third District Civil Court in Managua, issued a preventive embargo against the license

5. (C) The embargo against Telenica occurred amongst a cloud of speculation concerning the possible sale of the company, which includes Channel 8 and Radio 1 FM (109.1). BriceClo is currently entertaining offers from various groups for the sale of Telenica. The Nicaraguan press has reported that BriceClo is negotiating the sale of Telenica to Albanisa for USD \$10,000,000. BriceClo emphatically denied reports he had already sold or would sell Telenica to Albanisa. However, Carlos Fernando Chamorro, a prominent left of center, investigative reporter and host of two popular news shows on Channel 8, confirmed to post that BriceClo plans to sell Telenica to Albanisa. Our contact also informed post he is currently seeking a new home for his show. On November 15, BriceClo met with Rafael SolC-s, Vice-President of the Supreme Court and orchestrator of the Court's decision allowing Ortega's re-election. The purpose of the meeting which occurred at Channel 8 was unknown; however, post contacts and media reports suspect it was concerning the sale of Telenica to Albanisa. Many workers from both Channel 8 and Channel 4 believe the sale is already final. In an impromptu interview with Channel 4, the media station owned by President Ortega and First Lady Rosario Murillo, BriceClo denied the sale, but commented, "Some people in the media think I am doing something criminal. I can do with this channel what I want. I can have business partners. I can sell it completely. I can close it if I want to. There are sectors of society, that for ideological reasons, want to create an image of impropriety with this potential purchase."

6. (U) Press reports, as well as post contacts, have speculated that Telenica's possible sale to Albanisa is motivated in part by Ortega's desire to remove Carlos Fernando Chamorro from the air. Through his daily show, "Esta Noche" (Tonight), and weekly program, "Esta Semana" (This Week), Chamorro has been extremely critical of the FSLN government, conducting numerous investigative reports exposing government abuses of power.

7. (C) BriceClo might also be facing increasing legal pressures. In 2000, Telenica was embargoed by the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security (INSS) for nonpayment of \$72,000 dollars in workers' social security taxes. However, the debt was forgiven in negotiations with INSS. Since 2000, BriceClo has continued to avoid paying social security taxes and owes INSS for back taxes. We believe the FSLN government is using BriceClo's tax debt as leverage to pressure him into selling Telenica.

Comment

8. (C) Independent media which criticize the Ortega Administration continue to face intense political pressure from the government (Ref A,B,C, CALLAHAN